

To: Appropriations Committee
From: Jerome Rathbun, Chair, Explorations Charter School Advisory Board
Re: Senate Bill 1195
Date: 3/18/11

Ladies and Gentlemen: Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you. I have been involved with Explorations Charter School since it grew from a dream to a reality. Explorations and Charter Schools as a concept fills an extremely vital gap in our educational system. Explorations, located in Winsted in the Northwest corner, provides a learning opportunity that supports the student as an individual and works with them to develop their academic skills. Many of our students would not have made it to their senior year without this opportunity. Some of our students come to us with reasonable grades but low self-esteem. Others leave their home schools where they have been teased and bullied and arrive with academic skills below their grade level, believing no one cares. In addition, students come to us with IEP's, searching for a school where they are truly integrated with the student community and receive help without the stigma of being labeled.

Parents make a commitment to send their children to Explorations. This year we serve students from 16 towns. In addition to Winsted, Watertown and Torrington we serve students from Bloomfield, Canton, Granby and Simsbury to Litchfield, Lakeville and Sharon and smaller towns in between. Significant in this is that no transportation is provided for students who do not live in the town/city where the school is located.

We are a public school! Then why is funding for charter schools not on the same playing field as traditional Connecticut public schools? Our per pupil allotment is significantly less than traditional public schools. All we seek is a fair funding formula for charter schools. To date we have graduated 173 students! We believe we, and all the charter schools, have proven we can get results for less but we are now at a point where the question needs to be asked: How much less?

We believe our appeal is our small size – we currently have 85 students across grades 10 through 12 - and the individual attention we give to the student. Our graduates return every year to share their stories of success in college, military service and the workplace.

**PLEASE AT THE VERY LEAST ALLOW US TO OPERATE ON A
LEVEL PLAYING FIELD WITH CONNECTICUT PUBLIC SCHOOLS. A FAIR
FUNDING FORMULA MUST BE DEVELOPED. THE EDUCATIONAL
ENVIRONMENT HAS CHANGED.**

Thank you for your consideration. I know you will do the right thing.